THE CLIMATE OF THE CANADIAN YUKON.

The following extracts from an article by F. A. McDiarmid[1] in the Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, will assist us in forming a correct idea of the climatic conditions of the upper Yukon Valley, at least during the summer months:

The enchanting beauty of the wide-spreading Yukon Valley—its glorious sunshine and its wealth of vegetation and fruit and flowers—comes as a great surprise to one who beholds it for the first time, and often causes the exclamation "This can not be the North." Indeed it is not the north land of which we have read and thought perhaps to see, but away off in the distant blue are still the mountain peaks, capped with eternal snow. No more glorious summers are to be found anywhere on the earth's surface, nor for the sportsman can the northern autumn be excelled. Here in the late fall you can hear the moose and the cariboo calling that it is time to get into their favorite meadows where they winter, and in the white, soft evenings the goats and sheep are heard tramping in droves and seeming to confer as to the best location for their exodus; the grouse call softly in the thickets; the squirrels are busy adding to their already overflowing storehouses; and there are also the bears—black, grizzly, brown, and cinnamon—fat and sleek; and in the sedges can be heard the ducks and geese discussing their annual excursion to the south—truly a hunter's paradise.

People are always interested in the climate and continually ask "What is your weather?" We have no idea of the beautiful summers of the Yukon; we imagine that Dawson is a cold, barren place, and that even in the middle of summer snow is seen on every hand. Such notions are indeed far from the actual facts. The months of May, June, July, August, and part of September are regular paradises and are the finest we meet in any part of Canada. The visitor who expects to need heavy clothing is agreeably surprised; the sun shines for a large part of the twenty-four hours; indeed, at latitude 64° 40′ there is continuous daylight during the months of June and July. To the pole more heat comes from the sun during the 21st of June than comes to any other point on the earth's surface during any day of the year. Then, the sun giving out his heat and light makes it a desirable resort for the summer months. It is true that ice is found only a short distance below the surface of the ground, yet the traveller is perfectly ignorant of such a circumstance unless it be pointed out to him. The thermometer often registers 85° F. during the day and the evenings are clear and cool for sleeping. Vegetation is very rapid; the abundance of sunlight hurries things along; the heat from above combined with the moisture from below causes rapid growth; and consequently Dawson can boast of the finest vegetables in the world. Her lettuce, celery, beets, carrots, cabbages, and cauliflowers are unexcelled. As we go along the streets most brilliant flower gardens meet us on every hand, and if we forget ourselves a moment we would think we were in some tropical land. But the refreshing breeze from the mountain far away recalls us to ourselves.

We have described the Yukon from the standpoint of landscape and scenery. Let us now see it from the position of an astronomer. The weather of the Yukon is ideal for astronomical work, there being but little rain during the summer months. The experience of the writer during the season of 1906 was one cloudy night from the 13th August till the 7th September, while during the season of 1907 observations were obtained on 21 consecutive nights. On 19 of these the conditions were ideal for observing. The months of June or July give us only about three or four hours each night suited for observing, but if the observer has only a few hours at his disposal daily, yet he feels confident that nearly every night will be perfect. There is very little humidity in the atmosphere at any time; and consequently the stars are very steady and clearly defined. One can observe with comparative ease a sixth magnitude star in June when there is broad daylight. Often when we are waiting for good weather here in the East, and see night after night go by and nothing but clouds rewarding us, then we wish that we might have a few of the clear nights of the North.

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Another phenomenon that greatly affects the telegraph line is the Northern Lights; when the display of aurora is by any means brilliant it is almost impossible to keep the telegraph instruments adjusted. But if difficulties were presented in the way of our signal exchange, yet the beautiful display in the heavens quite repaid for any extra trouble. The scene can not be described; the whole sky was one magnificent picture with the scene continually changing; as the lights chased one another across the sky a peculiar buzzing sound was heard. To one who has never been in the North the phenomenon of the aurora borealis is very impressive indeed.

[1] Determination of the one hundred and forty-first meridian. Journal Roy. Astron. Soc. of Canada, 1908, Vol. II, p. 84–95.

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH.

The following quotation from the Michigan Alumnus for May, 1908, applies as well to meteorologists as to engineers:

There can be no doubt of the final value of English to the professional man, although it is only recently that it has been recognized. Time was—and that not long ago—when English, as a definite study, was overlooked entirely, or at best wofully underestimated, to the advantage of other studies of less practical importance. It is precisely this point, the practical value of English to the professional man, as represented by the engineer, that forms the basis of an article by H. P. Breitenbach, of the engineering faculty of the university, which appears in the March number of the Engineering Digest. One engineer quoted in the article regards it "more important even that the engineering student should be proficient in the writing of English than the collegian. The ability to express himself clearly and accurately may be said to be a tool of his trade, for he has to write reports and prepare specifications, the very soul of which is accuracy." As expressed in a quotation from another engineer, "The big work of the engineer is done with the typewriter rather than with the slide-rule or T square." The cultural value of English, as distinguished from the technical or professional, is important, for it opens up avenues of approach into the literature of science, history, and art, not only increasing the general usefulness of the engineer and his individual enjoyment, but proving of practical importance to him as a business man in his social and business relations.

The testimonial value of the preceding phrases is emphasized by the fact that they are mainly quotations from letters received by the engineering department of the university, as an outcome of a discussion that arose in an English class of junior engineers. The members of this class wrote to alumni of the department on various questions at issue, and among these was the value of English to the practicing engineer. All of the fifty replies received agreed in ascribing to English a high value among the assets of an engineer, with its chief professional applications—in addition to the furthering of his command of speech—the writing of business letters, articles for the press, reports, contracts, and specifications.

Among the comparatively new applications of English in the special field of engineering is the writing of technical catalogues, pamphlets and other advertising matter, and the editing of technical journals. The latter field may be called a product of the last quarter century, and is only just now offering desirable openings for engineers.